[0047] Flexible strip **300** is an elastomer strip of material that includes an upper surface **305**, a lower surface **307**, and one or more cavities **320**. Although elastomer is preferable, flexible strip **300** can be composed of any resilient material. Preferably, flexible strip **300** is a continuous strip of material that extends around at least one side of display **110**. However, flexible strip **300** may be sectioned (i.e., non-continuous) as appropriate in the user environment to satisfy design requirements.

[0048] Upper surface **305** is a surface of flexible strip **300** that is exposed to a user as illustrated in **FIG. 1**. Preferably, upper surface **305** is smooth, however, it may include protrusions to allow users to locate certain areas on active edge input device **120** by touch alone. The smoothness of upper surface **305** allows users to drag their finger or other instrument along flexible strip **300** in a sweeping motion. This motion, for example, may be used to implement a scrolling function which allows a user to scroll through information on display **110**.

[0049] Lower surface **307** includes a resistive plate **310** that is responsive to a human touch. Preferably, resistive plate **310** extends along lower surface **307** as a continuous strip of conductive material. However, resistive plate **310** may have separate and distinct sections that are positioned along lower surface **307**. Resistive plate **310** may comprise resistive material currently used in conventional touch-screen devices.

[0050] Attached to resistive plate **310** are one or more protrusions **308** that extend outward and include extensions **309**. The face of extensions **309** include input device electrical contacts **330** fixed thereon, as illustrated in **FIG. 3***a*. These electrical contacts are "puck-shaped" and are formed from an electrically conductive material (e.g., carbon).

[0051] Body surface **350** includes body electrical contacts **340** which are fixed thereon. These electrical contacts are also composed of an electrically conductive material (e.g., carbon) and are aligned with input device electrical contacts **330**. A gap exists between the electrical contacts on body surface **350** and the electrical contacts on extensions **309** while active edge input device **120** is at rest.

[0052] Cavities **320** are formed in an area of flexible strip **300** adjacent each protrusion **308**. Preferably, each of cavities **320** are formed in an image of protrusions **308** and extensions **309**, as illustrated in **FIG. 3***a*, but may have any shape. Cavities **320** are designed to collapse when a pressure is applied and return to its original shape when the pressure is released. Thus, cavities **320** provide a "soft button" effect when a pressure is applied thereto by a user. The deformation of cavities **320** under pressure is illustrated in **FIGS. 3***b* and **3***c*.

[0053] **FIG. 3***b* illustrates a cross-sectional view of a touch applied to active edge input device **120** consistent with a second embodiment of the present invention. This figure shows the first step of the "two-step" functionality described herein. In this instance, a voltage is applied to resistive plate **310** during operation of the host device. When a human touches upper surface **305** of flexible strip **300** (e.g., on area **360**), a change in voltage is detected and a first signal is generated. Processor **130** receives the first signal and responds by implementing user interface software **160**. A discussion of how processor **130** implements user interface software **160** is described with respect to FIGS. **4-6**. Although **FIG. 3***b* illustrates deformation of flexible strip **300** in the area where a touch is applied, active edge input device **120** can be configured to simply sense a human touch without requiring the application of pressure to flexible strip **300**. In this instance, resistive plate **310** simply detects the presence of a human touch on area **360** and does not require any deformation of flexible strip **300**.

[0054] **FIG. 3***c* illustrates a cross-sectional view of a pressure applied to active edge input device **120** consistent with a second embodiment of the present invention. This figure shows the second step of the "two-step" functionality described herein. In this instance, the first pressure shown in **FIG. 3***b* is increased to a second pressure (e.g., a "press") on area **370** of flexible strip **300** until input device electrical contact **330** makes contact with body electrical contact **340**. The second pressure deforms flexible strip **300** including resistive plate **310** and cavity **320**. The connection of the electrical contacts generates a second signal to processor **130** which is processed accordingly by implementing user interface software **160**.

[0055] **FIGS. 4***a*-**4***b* illustrate the operation of selecting an item illustrated on a display using an active edge input device consistent with the present invention. Specifically, the operation of display **400**, active edge input devices **420** and **430**, and user interface software **160** (of **FIG. 1**) is discussed with reference to **FIGS. 4***a*-**4***b*. Active edge input devices consistent with the present invention are dynamically configurable such that different functions can be associated with each selectable area of the input device depending on the user environment.

[0056] **FIGS. 4***a* and **4***b* illustrate a mode of operation for an active edge user interface consistent with the present invention. The user environment illustrated in these figures includes a notebook computer with an active edge user interface. The notebook computer includes a display **400** and active edge input devices **420** and **430** located on the right and left sides of display **400**, respectively. Active edge input devices **420** and **430** may include the design of **FIGS. 2***a*-**2***c* or **3***a*-**3***c*. In either case, the user can enter information into the notebook computer using active edge input devices **420** and **430**.

[0057] Initially, information stored in data storage **150** or a peripheral device is generated on display **400**. As shown in **FIG. 4***a*, this information relates to fashion and includes a main category "clothing" displayed on the left side of display **400** and a plurality of sub-categories including "shoes, socks, shirts, pants, jackets, scarfs, and hats" displayed on the right side of display **400**. In operation, a user can touch or press an area of active edge input device **420** to highlight a sub-category adjacent thereto. In addition, users can drag their finger down or up active edge user input device **420** to scroll through the sub-categories. As illustrated in **FIG. 4***a*, the sub-category "shirts" is highlighted as a result of a touch or press on an adjacent area of active edge input device **420**. A sub-category, or any data displayed and selected using embodiments consistent with the present invention, can by highlighted in many different ways. For example, the selected data can change colors, expand, contract, flash, or be affected in any manner that indicates it has been selected by a user via active edge input device **420**.

[0058] The touch or press on active edge input device **420** corresponding to the selection of the "shirts" sub-category